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## Historic Black Landmarks: a Traveler's Guide

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family by choosing to play in the streets and tunnel under the high fences to communicate with neighbors.

There are eighteen chapters in this volume on a wide range of architectural topics. With the copious notes and bibliography, readers and researchers can discover the most recent thinking about vernacular homes, churches, schools, and commercial structures.

*Historic Black Landmarks: A Traveler's Guide*, by George Cantor. Detroit: Visible Ink Press, 1991. xxx, 372 pp. Illustrations, timeline, bibliography, index. \$17.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY SPENCER CREW, NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN HISTORY

In the initial pages of this book, George Cantor recounts a reference made to African Americans in one of the *American Guides* written during the Great Depression by the Federal Writers Project. The reference made by the writer was not very flattering and pointed out the limited information available at the time these volumes were created about historic sites associated with African Americans. Black Americans were seen as amusing sources of anecdotes rather than significant contributors to the historical development of the nation. They were largely invisible or silent members in the American historical story.

This disregard of black historical contributions has not changed dramatically in the intervening years. According to George Cantor, who has written several travel books, travelers interested in learning more about African-American history must search long and hard for information. Contemporary travel books still tend to ignore or provide only rudimentary information about historic sites associated with African-American events or individuals. Why this is the case is not always clear. In part it is due to the lack of knowledge many writers have about the contributions of African Americans. Their volumes often build on the work of previous travel authors and rarely make use of the research produced by historians in recent years. It takes a great deal of hard work and exploration of new and nontraditional sources to uncover sites critical to the history of African Americans. Not many travel book writers have been willing to put forth that effort.

Fortunately, George Cantor was willing to uncover the caches of information available about African-American historic landmarks. It was not a simple task. Many offices of tourism in individual states have been slow to generate information about black landmarks in their states. They do not necessarily see this information as useful or in very high demand by tourists they target. Consequently, the author had

to find alternative sources to help him identify significant places for inclusion in the book.

Robert L. Harris of Cornell University was one of those sources. He provides a brief overview of the history of black America in the book's foreword, which is a well-written and comprehensive presentation of the African-American experience from the colonial period through the election of L. Douglas Wilder as the first African-American governor of Virginia. The essay gives scholarly credence to Cantor's contention that a volume on black landmarks is needed and can increase appreciation for the contributions of African Americans. Faces and places familiar to historians appear throughout the essay as Harris recounts the presence of African Americans in locations as diverse as Jamestown, Virginia, during the seventeenth century and Little Rock, Arkansas, during the twentieth century. More importantly, for readers unaware of these historical moments and places, it offers a better understanding of the breadth and depth of the connections African Americans have to this country. The essay is a wonderful introduction to the material that follows.

The remainder of the volume is an educational and entertaining tour that highlights numerous landmarks throughout the United States and in parts of Canada. The book does not claim to cover every important landmark, but focuses on places that have some tangible, visible presence travelers can see when they visit the sites. The sites mentioned cover a wide array of historical figures and moments. In each instance Cantor has done more than just offer basic descriptive information. He has consulted a variety of resources in order to offer readers a rationale for visiting the locations. Some of the resulting information is solidly grounded in historical research, while other parts of it emerge from folklore and other local beliefs about the significance of the landmarks. The combination of sources makes for stimulating reading and reminds readers of the importance of mythology in the crafting of belief systems.

A number of interesting and surprising landmarks show up in the book. The Chehalis County Museum in Centralia, Washington, for example, contains information about George Washington, Centralia's African-American founder. He came to the area in the 1850s. With the land he received in a deal with the local railroad, Washington laid out lots for a new town, which grew steadily over the years. When Washington died in 1905, local residents shut down the city for a day of mourning. The museum and his gravestone in the cemetery pay tribute to his contributions. *Historic Black Landmarks* is replete with similar

stories about both well-known and not-so-well-known individuals and places.

A significant black landmark is not too far away from wherever one might go. Because of the wide variety of places it covers, *Historic Black Landmarks* is an excellent book to put in the glove compartment of your automobile or in your suitcase and take along as you travel to different parts of the country. It will provide wonderful side trips when one has a little free time and is interested in experiencing a palpable piece of African-American history.

*African American Historic Places*, edited by Beth L. Savage. Washington, DC: Preservation Press, 1994. 623 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, indexes. \$25.95 paper.

*In Their Footsteps: The American Visions Guide to African-American Heritage Sites*, by Henry Chase. New York: Henry Holt, 1994. xxiv, 584 pp. Chronology, illustrations, maps, bibliography, index. \$16.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY SHIRLEY J. PORTWOOD, SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY AT EDWARDSVILLE

These guides are important additions to the literature on African-American landmarks. *In Their Footsteps*, by Henry Chase, includes nearly one thousand sites from forty-six states, the District of Columbia, Nova Scotia, and Ontario. *African American Historic Places*, edited by Beth L. Savage, covers about eight hundred sites in forty-two states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. *Historic Places* includes three pages on Iowa; *Footsteps* has nine. Both address the Midwest in some detail. The guides offer a balance between sites with national significance and those of local or regional importance. Each features places associated with notables such as Ida B. Wells-Barnett and George Washington Carver. The lives of lesser-known African Americans are also featured in places such as Buxton, a predominantly black town in Iowa that is included in both guides.

Both *Historic Places* and *Footsteps* address a broad audience. Vivid narratives and excellent photographs depict the lives of African Americans and set them in the context of two hundred years of historical development in business, education, politics, and other fields. Institutional history is featured prominently. Churches, historically the center of public life for many blacks, are numerous. Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) in Philadelphia and Martin Luther King Jr.'s Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, are included in both guides. Others are discussed in only one: *Historic*

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